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# Last Meeting with Heidegger\*

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IN 1933, when I was last in Freiburg for two days, I attended Heidegger's lecture course. He was in the process of analyzing different ways of silence, something he was an expert in. He invited me to dinner at his house; his wife was not there. We avoided all delicate topics in our conversation and limited ourselves to the question of whether I should give up my position at the University of Marburg and take up a prospect in Istanbul. He offered me a bed in his house for the night and seemed a bit surprised when I did not accept his offer. I had a place to stay with a former university friend who was an assistant professor in the medical school. The next day I visited Husserl. Heidegger had completely broken with him and had not called on his "fatherly friend" (this had been the stereotypical form of address in his letters) since the radical change in government. Husserl was mild, composed, and absorbed in his work yet he was inwardly hurt by the behavior of his student, who was now the rector and the successor to his chair at the University of Freiburg. derlin in the Italian-German Culture Institute there.

In 1936, when I was in Rome, Heidegger gave a lecture on Hölderlin in the Italian-German Culture Institute there. Afterward he

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came back with me to our apartment and was visibly taken aback by the destitution of our furnishings. Above all, he missed my library, which was still in Germany. In the evening I accompanied him to his room in the Hertiziana, where his wife greeted me with stiff but friendly restraint. It was probably embarrassing for her to remember how often I had previously been a guest in her house. The director of the Institute had invited us to the Osso Buco for dinner, and we avoided political topics.

The next day, my wife and I made an excursion to Frascati and Tusculum with Heidegger, his wife, and his two sons, whom I had often taken care of when they were younger. It was a brilliant day, and I was happy about this last get-together, despite inevitable reservations. Even on this occasion, Heidegger had not removed the Party insignia from his jacket. He wore it during his entire stay in Rome, and it had apparently not occurred to him that the swastika was out of place when spending a day with me. We talked about Italy, Freiburg, and Marburg and about philosophical things. He was friendly and attentive, yet avoided, as did his wife, every allusion to the situation in Germany and his views of it. On the way back, I wanted to get him to make an open comment on it. I turned the conversation to the controversy in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and explained to him that I agreed neither with Barth's political attack [on Heidegger] nor with Staiger's defense,<sup>1</sup> because it was my opinion that a partisanship for National Socialism lay in the essence of his philosophy. Heidegger agreed with me without reservation and elucidated that his concept of "historicity" was the basis of his political "engagement." He also left no doubt about his belief in Hitler. According to him, Hitler had underestimated only two things: the vitality of the Christian churches and the obstacles to the Anschluss of Austria. He was still convinced that National Socialism was the path that was mapped out for Germany; one merely had to "hold out" long enough. Only the excessive organizing at the expense of vital energies seemed questionable to him. He did not notice the destructive radicalism of the entire movement and the petit bourgeois nature of all its "Strength through Joy" [*Kraft-durch-Freude*] institutions, because he himself was a radical petit bourgeois. He was silent at first in response to my comment that although I could understand many things about his behavior, there was one thing I could not; namely, that he could sit at one and the same table (in the Academy for German Law) with an individual like J. Streicher.<sup>2</sup> Finally the well-known justification reluctantly followed (K. Barth has compiled it very well in his *Theologische Existenz heute*). It

boiled down to this: that everything would have been "much worse" if at least some of those with knowledge had not involved themselves. And with bitter resentment against the "intelligentsia," he concluded his explanation: "If those gentlemen had not thought themselves too fine to get involved, things would have been different, but instead I was all alone." To my response that one did not exactly have to be "fine" to refuse to work with Streicher, he replied: one need not waste any words over Streicher, the *Stürmer* was nothing but pornography. He could not understand why Hitler did not get rid of that character; he must be afraid of him. This response was typical, for nothing is easier for Germans than to be radical in their ideas and indifferent in everything actual. They somehow manage to ignore *all individual facts* in order to hold on to their *concept of the whole* all the more resolutely, to separate the "matter" from the "person."<sup>3</sup> In actuality, however, the program of that "pornography" was completely fulfilled and was a German reality in November 1938,<sup>4</sup> and no one can deny that Streicher and Hitler agree precisely on this point.

Later, when I sent him my book on Burckhardt and my book on Nietzsche, which had appeared a year before, I did not receive a word of thanks, let alone an objective comment. I wrote to Heidegger twice more from Japan: once because of a translation of *Being and Time* into Japanese and the other because of a few rare works that I had given him in Freiburg and now needed temporarily. He answered both letters with silence. Thus ended my relationship to the man who, in 1928, conferred upon me the qualification to teach at the university level. I was the first and only one of his students at the University of Marburg upon whom he conferred the Habilitation.

Husserl died in Freiburg in 1938. Heidegger attested his "admiration and friendship" (the terms with which he had dedicated *Being and Time* to Husserl in 1927) in that he risked no words of remembrance or condolence, neither publicly nor privately, neither spoken nor written on the occasion of his death. B. [Oskar Becker], who owed his whole philosophical "existence" to Husserl, likewise evaded this awkward situation by not reacting, for the "simple" reason that his teacher was a dismissed Jew and he was an Aryan with a permanent position. Since Hitler, this heroism had become typical behavior of Germans who owed their positions to a German Jew. But Heidegger and B. probably felt that their behavior was "honest" and "consistent." What else could they have done in such awkward situations?